

U.S. Department of Education
2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

[X] Public or [] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [X] Title I [] Charter [] Magnet [] Choice

Name of Principal Mrs Darlene Martinez Solis
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Ramona Elementary School
(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 351 Nichols Road
(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

City El Paso State TX Zip Code+4 (9 digits total) 79915-2307

County El Paso

Telephone (915) 434-7700 Fax (915) 434-7700

Web site/URL https://www.yisd.net/ramona E-mail dsolis1@yisd.net

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent* Dr. Xavier De La Torre E-mail xdelatorre@yisd.net
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

District Name Ysleta Independent School District Tel. (915) 434-0032

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson Mr. Cruz A. Ochoa Jr.
(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date _____

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

**Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, leave blank.*

PART I – ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The electronic signature on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2021 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration must include one or more of grades K-12. Schools located on the same campus (physical location and mailing address) must apply as an entire school (i.e. K-8; 6-12; K-12 school). Two (or more) schools located on separate campuses, must apply individually even if they have the same principal. A single school located on multiple campuses with one principal must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2015 and grades participating in statewide assessments must have been part of the school for at least the three years prior to September 2019.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the current school year (2020-2021) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT (Question 1 is not applicable to non-public schools.)

- Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
 - 33 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 10 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 11 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools

54 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools. Only include demographic data for the nominated school, not the district.)

- Category that best describes the area where the school is located. If unsure, refer to NCES database for correct category: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/> (Find your school and check “Locale”)

- Urban (city or town)
 Suburban
 Rural

- Number of students as of October 1, 2020 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent at the school. Include all students enrolled, in-person, participating in a hybrid model, or online only. If online schooling or other COVID-19 school issues make this difficult to obtain, provide the most accurate and up-to-date information available:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	16	21	37
1	15	21	36
2	22	19	41
3	22	16	38
4	18	26	44
5	23	22	45
6	13	27	40
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	129	152	281

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 0 % Black or African American
 - 98.2 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0.4 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 1.4 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2019 - 2020 school year: 10%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain:

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	23
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2019 until the end of the 2019-2020 school year	3
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	26
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2019	266
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.10
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	10

6. Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):

Spanish

English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 42 %
118 Total number ELL

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 80 %

Total number students who qualify: 225

8. Students receiving special education services: 15 %

41 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. All students receiving special education services should be reflected in the table below. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>2</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>8</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>0</u> Developmental Delay | <u>6</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>17</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>6</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 1

10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to the nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below. If your current staffing structure has shifted due to COVID-19 impacts and you are uncertain or unable to determine FTEs, provide an estimate.

	Number of Staff
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers, including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	21
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher etc.	7
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	3
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	7

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 13:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2019-2020	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016
Daily student attendance	98%	96%	96%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2020.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award. 2007

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

The Ramona Elementary School learning community will empower students to be lifelong learners and critical thinkers through collaborative, project-based learning that focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics in order to prepare leaders who exhibit integrity in a competitive global community.

16. Briefly describe how your school has been operating during the current 2020-2021 school year (e.g., open as usual, online only, a hybrid model, etc.)? If different grade levels in your building operate in different ways, include this. If the school began with one model and switched to another partially through the year, include this as well.

Ramona Elementary School began the school year in August 2020 with online learning for all students, followed by the opening of a campus Learning Hub in September for K-6 students with limited internet access who were struggling academically and/or at the parent’s request. After a two-week intersession in October, the Learning Hub reopened to continue supporting students in need. In February 2021, Ramona opened for face-to-face and hybrid learning for all K-6 grade students whose parents opted to send their child to the campus, while continuing the options of online learning. Regardless of the dual teaching challenges, teachers have continued to develop rigorous lessons to provide the best education for all students.

17. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

PART III - SUMMARY

Ramona Elementary School is a community staple, representing the values, traditions and beliefs of families it has educated for over 70 years. Ramona joined the Ysleta Independent School District in 1952 in El Paso, Texas, about one mile from the U.S.-Mexico border. Railroad tracks are on two sides of the campus. The school is bounded by industry, including oil refineries across the street that serve as Ramona's Partners in Education, supporting the campus vision by providing volunteer readers and grant opportunities. Ramona is part of an older, close-knit neighborhood – it is customary for multigenerational families to participate in school events. In this zip code, only 66.1 percent of residents have a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to 81.2 percent in El Paso, 84.7 percent in Texas, and 86.6 percent in the United States, according to U.S. Census figures from April 2021. This humble community trusts the positive influence of a school that is evolving, leading the pack, and striving to give an educational advantage to its children. Supporting sub-populations is everyone's job, as it means meeting each child's needs. In spite of academic and socioeconomic factors, staff members put students first. They instill high expectations and build relationships with stakeholders to provide excellence for all. This makes Ramona the heart of the neighborhood.

Ramona's previous 2007 National Blue Ribbon School award highlighted the dual language success and helped shape the district's dual language model. Ramona has maintained state assessment scores above state standards in all academic areas except science. Improving science achievement inspired the schoolwide Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) dream in 2014. Staff researched science college and career readiness and discovered the need for STEM education. The Texas Education Agency's (TEA) STEM blueprint became the framework for Ramona to transform to an authentic STEM campus to address the substandard academic performance in science. In order to launch the STEM program, administration, instructional coaches and the librarian wrote grants to provide professional development for best practices of STEM education. With the buy-in of all stakeholders, the new STEM vision became a reality in Fall 2015. The result was a schoolwide STEM challenge time structured into the master schedule and consistent implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) across all grade levels.

The STEM program instills an enthusiasm in students for complex learning. Teacher-created STEM challenges are standards-based and highly engaging. They integrate career connections and utilize the 21st-century skills of communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. Students are strategically grouped to target English Language Learners (ELL), a strategy that contributed to an increase of over 12 percent of ELL students demonstrating progress in English language acquisition. Because all faculty and paraprofessionals are assigned across grade levels, there is a culture of teamwork and commitment to relevant learning. Gifted and Talented (GT) students are also grouped to practice social interactions – students are assigned real-world roles within challenges, such as seismologist or structural engineer. PBL integrates cross-curricular standards and challenges students to develop creativity and problem-solving skills. In a progressive effort for students to apply their learning to solve real-world problems, a Makerspace was created. All students visit a series of hands-on, innovative learning stations with STEM-related activities. Stations enable students to explore creativity with Legos, design pathways for ozobots, design circuit greeting cards, create 3D structures, and make real-world connections by assembling simple machines devised for a specific purpose. Stations are redesigned by the leadership team annually.

Family events put the engineering design process into action through STEM challenges, as well as model thought processes, which enhance parent/child interactions at home. Literacy events include reader's theater, poetry slams and skill games; and the community participates in monthly physical education events that include the Ramona Olympics and Dancing with Ramona.

Ramona's collaborative efforts in STEM have resulted in academic success in all areas. Science scores have rocketed at all performance levels, increasing from 77 percent to 100 percent at Approaches Grade Level; from 37 percent to 70 percent at Meets Grade Level; and from 0 percent to 40 percent at the Masters Grade Level. Ramona's accomplishments have generated statewide interest, prompting visits from schools, school districts, El Paso Community College (EPCC), the College of Education from the University of Texas at El Paso, and Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath. Ramona showcased its STEM journey at the 2017

Texas STEM Conference; and in 2019, earned an “A” campus rating and all six TEA distinction designations available to elementary schools. Ramona was also the first YISD elementary school to be designated EPCC’s College Bound campus. The school also earned 2015-2019 Honor Roll School designations, and was highlighted by the University of Texas at Austin as a Spotlight on Dual Language Campus. Ramona’s achievement is a testament to high expectations and collaboration, regardless of the obstacles.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Ramona’s staff is committed to best practices that leverage learning for all students. Professional Learning Communities (PLC) provide the structure for teachers, administration, and instructional coaches to analyze data, review assessments through backward design, unpack standards, plan lessons and interventions, and prepare assessments. Student mastery of instruction is assessed through more than just traditional testing – it is more of a holistic approach that consists of exit tickets, rubrics, presentations, learning reflections, and formal assessments. Lessons follow a gradual-release model to monitor student progress and adjust instruction.

Ramona's reading curriculum follows a balanced literacy framework that consists of word study, read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, literacy stations/independent reading, and writers' workshop. Homogeneous guided-reading groups accelerate reading level growth. Based on data, Tier 3 students work with the teacher daily; Tier 2 meets three times a week; and Tier 1 meets twice a week. Tier 3 students also receive additional sessions with the interventionist. The instructional team monitors students’ reading levels to ensure growth, and Learning Centers spiral skills for students to apply their learning. In the virtual setting, teachers continue with balanced literacy and PBL lessons, where breakout rooms are used for reading. Students benefit from anchor charts, interactive guided reading books, and chapter books in a variety of literature genres, while teachers integrate strategies learned from attending reading academies.

Ramona has adopted a holistic, all-hands-on-deck approach to writing – the expectation is for students to become fluent writers in all academic areas. Teachers collaborate in grades K-6 to align writing, and students respond to writing prompts with authentic writing pieces, which are displayed in the hallways. A rigor matrix helps identify the rigor of the writing activity, and writing samples are rated and analyzed to chart progress. Student cumulative portfolios document growth and grade-level needs, and instructional coaches and support staff conduct individual student conferences to address revising/editing and the writing process. Students are given instant feedback in the form of “Glows & Grows,” and given goals for the next conference. Fourth-grade students attend a writing camp targeting low data standards. Writing is also taught within STEM – assignments include a written reflection piece as part of the engineering design process. This year, Ramona adapted to online learning in a variety of ways: Breakout rooms and virtual meets were used for conferences; teachers used digital resources to model the writing process; and digital anchor charts aided with revising/editing and appropriate conventions. Students responded to prompts using their digital classroom and images of their writing. Ramona staff also reached out to every fourth grader’s parent to allow in-person participation for students in the writing camp.

Ramona’s team strives to help students learn how to become mathematical problem-solvers. Instruction consists of identifying vocabulary, modeling, anchor charts to help students understand the concept, small-group conferencing, pre-teaching struggling students, and use of manipulatives. The math instructional block consists of problem-solving and skill review, followed by concept development. Gradual-release instruction follows concrete to conceptual to abstract manipulatives – this helps build students’ conceptual understanding before progressing to the abstract level. Low performing standards are spiraled into STEM challenges and Makerspace stations for additional learning opportunities. COVID-19 accommodations included online tools that show student work and breakout rooms for intervention; interactive lessons where students use virtual manipulatives to problem-solve and make connections through the use of visuals.

Science achievement is attributed to the schoolwide-focused STEM program and its intentionally structured challenges, and PBL and Makerspace components that follow the engineering design process. Additionally, students receive 45 minutes of science classroom instruction daily. Science standards drive the STEM program. Grade-level challenges involve grouping monolingual and dual-language students, and are based on targeted standards. Teachers utilize linguistic strategies (sentence stems, chants, accountable talk) to support ELL students. Grade levels integrate science and reading standards within PBL lessons. Makerspace opportunities provide real-world application of science, math, reading and writing process skills, such as circuit and programming stations. Fifth-grade students participate in a Science Palooza, consisting of small-group interventions. COVID-19 adjustments include virtual lab investigations and Makerspace stations,

digital interactive notebooks, and STEM, PBL and Makerspace materials per student. Student grouping is addressed through online breakout rooms.

Social studies standards are integrated with reading. Classroom libraries include non-fiction texts to help students with captions, photos, graphs, charts, glossaries and bold print. Word walls are created during social studies units to build context and support. Interactive notebooks are utilized for research, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Social studies content is incorporated as a daily oral language review for revising/editing in writing. Students are asked to research and create oral presentations by recording themselves using a video application, which aligns with 21st-century skills embedded within the STEM program. Students also participate in an annual social studies showcase, for which COVID-19 adjustments include digital notebooks and video presentations.

1a. For secondary schools (middle and/or high school grades):

1b. For schools that offer preschool for three- and/or four-year old students:

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

Supplemental curricular areas help foster a positive mindset for students, and contribute to the collaborative culture of the campus. Physical Education (PE), Fine Arts, Library, and Technology follow their respective Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and incorporate cross-curricular content.

Ramona's PE department engages K-6 students in daily 45-minute fitness skill lessons. Coaches integrate math and PBL into their curriculum. PE events such as Ramona Olympics and Dancing with Ramona – to name a few – boast high parent participation, and prompted the school's coach to be named the 2018-19 YISD Elementary Teacher of the Year. PE classes are still very active and offer engaging activities for students despite COVID-19, and the campus plans to continue annual events like Kite Day because of the excitement it brings to students.

The K-6 Dual-Language program and STEM work seamlessly to improve student achievement. Monolingual and dual-language students are mixed together to complete science, math, and language arts TEKS-based engineering challenges, which allow ELL students to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing with grade-level peers. Before COVID-19, teams followed the engineering design process with a set of materials – now, teams work the process through virtual breakout rooms using individual materials.

In regard to Fine Arts, K-4 students participate in weekly 45-minute visual arts lessons while students in grades 5-6 choose to participate in band, orchestra, or visual arts. Fifth-graders have 30-minute daily lessons while sixth-graders attend class for 45 minutes a day. During the pandemic, virtual lessons continued, with students receiving individual art materials.

Students also attend weekly library classes for 45 minutes. The librarian engages students through storytelling and research skills, working closely with teachers to identify students' academic needs and embed grade-level literacy targets into lessons to shore up learning gaps. The library provides students access to eBooks, magazines, and databases. During the pandemic, the librarian has not only provided students with virtual public library cards to check out literature of their choice, but pre-recorded readings so students can access the video from home anytime.

The Instructional Technologist (IT) meets with K-6 classes 45 minutes weekly to teach state standards and 21st-century digital skills that students can utilize to show learning across content areas. The IT teaches students 3D printing, coding, and programming, and coaches the grades 3-6 Robotics team to participate in face-to-face and virtual competitions. In addition, the IT supports teachers and parents by providing technology resources or assisting with technical issues.

The counselor implements an evidenced-based Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum in addition to monthly 45-minute guidance lessons provided to all students to foster a culture of kindness. The lessons focus on respect, caring, integrity, responsibility, and courage. Throughout the uncertainty of the pandemic, the counselor has played a key role for students and families. The counselor not only provides lessons, but works with individual students who have been negatively affected by the pandemic, and helps families in need by reaching out to community agencies for food and financial support.

3. Academic Supports:

At Ramona, building relationships with students and parents has proven beneficial for student success. The progressive staff gets to know the students both academically and personally – and before the school year begins, teachers call parents to introduce themselves and welcome students to a new year of learning. Student strengths and needs are discussed and families are assured their child will be cared for and learning at high levels. Teachers review previous years' data, language acquisition profiles for ELLs, Special Education (SPED) accommodations, and previous teacher profiles that share the child's successful learning style. Ramona's team focuses on a strong Tier I instruction, designed with differentiation for all learners at every performance level. Academic growth for all is the team's goal. For Tier 3 students below grade level, small-group interventions are provided by teachers, part-time retired teachers, and support staff who deliver lessons tailored to student needs. Extra interventions are also provided during intersession week and afterschool. Monthly Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings are held with teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, interventionist, counselor, and parent(s) to design interventions and checkpoints for growth. SPED student Individualized Education Plans are supported by classroom teachers, SPED inclusion/resource teachers, interventionist and instructional coaches with lessons that accommodate individualized learning. ELL student supports include sentence stems, visuals, anchor charts, and frontloading vocabulary and concepts. Recent immigrants receive additional assistance in reading and language arts skills. All students, including those performing at above grade level, conference with teachers and their counselor to review performance trackers, set goals, and discuss next steps for growth. Conferences have been powerful in motivating students to take ownership and strive to reach goals. Additionally, the counselor works with students with personalized strategies – such as organization, motivation skills, etc. – to enable them to meet their academic goals. Instructional coaches and teachers review academic gaps for students performing above grade level, and curtail specific after-school interventions to move them to the next performance level. High expectations for all students are possible with consistent team efforts.

The STEM program positively impacts all students' learning and academic performance – in fact, 100% of the ELL and SPED students met or exceeded standards in state assessments in science and writing in 2019! A science gap of 17% among ELL students in 2014 closed primarily because of the STEM challenge program, as well as the mixed grouping of monolingual and dual-language students; science-based challenges; language arts and math standards; increased opportunities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing; and the use of rubrics and reflections to assess learning. STEM structures include a 45-minute designated time for challenges built into the master schedule. Students in grades K-3 alternate STEM challenge weeks with students in grades 4-6 in order to utilize common areas and support staff assistance. Challenges follow the engineering design process and are created by teachers based on the lowest performing standards in science. Career influenced roles are assigned to students for real-world connections. PBL lessons and Makerspace stations integrate science, reading, math, and writing, as well as 21st-century skills.

PART V – SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

1. Engaging Students:

Despite the ongoing pandemic, the Ramona team vowed to continue engaging students in learning and maximizing growth. The schoolwide STEM program continued for all students remotely, as it has been successful in meeting the diverse academic and social needs of the students. STEM challenges were converted to virtual challenges – teachers planned highly engaging challenges, embedding virtual learning strategies and the 21st-century skills of communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking. Materials for challenges are provided to all students to follow the engineering design process at home with their group. Strategic grouping of students supports all special populations and their respective needs. SPED staff members join their student groups, the counselor assists students with emotional needs, and other staff members are assigned based on strengths. For example, the librarian – a former fourth-grade teacher – facilitates fourth-grade STEM and provides interventions in reading, writing and math.

This year, Ramona Elementary was privileged to pilot a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) application that displays a student’s well-being on a daily basis. Before morning announcements, all students access the SEL assessment, an engaging, emoji-based, and biopsychosocial assessment that immediately tells teachers how students are feeling that day. This data, in turn, impacts the trajectory of every child’s day by allowing the counselor and teacher to intervene and provide strategies to help students turn a negative day into a positive one. SEL helps build a foundation that supports students’ success, both personally and academically. In addition, during the morning announcements, all students, faculty and staff engage in an SEL activity to help start the day in a positive way.

Celebrations, PE, and attendance are key to student engagement. Every month, a student is chosen from each classroom and recognized during the virtual morning announcements. Students are acknowledged for meeting their reading and math goals, and showing growth in performance trackers. PE classes offer monthly activities such as dancing, gymnastics, wrestling, and various sport competitions. In order to motivate students to attend school every day, perfect attendance classes are recognized daily and every nine weeks. Every morning, teachers contact the front office if a student is not present at the beginning of class – office personnel then reach out to parents to have their child join class. Where there’s a will, there’s a way – that is the mantra of Ramona team members when it comes to connecting with scholars.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

Families and local Partners In Education (PIE) play a vital role in students’ education and social development. Parents not only make educational decisions for their child, but participate in conferences, intervention discussions, and celebrations. The school’s Parent Liaison offers not only volunteer opportunities at the campus, but parent workshops that cover nutrition and homework assistance. Family events include literacy, math and STEM nights, where students apply learning and present projects to parents and community members at a STEM showcase. The campus also holds an annual PE Demonstration Day to highlight the school’s PE program, with students performing gymnastics, wrestling and dance. Where other campuses have 20 to 30 students participating in the PE demonstration, Ramona recruits at least half of the student body – and at the end of the event, parents join students on the gym floor for a mass dance or physical skill performance.

Other events that parents look forward to each year are the Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and Grandparent’s Day celebrations, where extended family members participate in literacy activities. Despite COVID-19, events continued as virtual recognitions and activities. Career Day connects parents to classrooms as they share a myriad of occupations with students, from firefighters and engineers to City Council representatives and pilots. Community representatives also welcomed the opportunity during COVID-19 to join the students online to bring Career Day to life.

Community involvement is another component dear to Ramona. The PIE program supports several school initiatives, including STEM. Partnerships with a local refinery, mining company, and airborne chapter help

reinforce the Ramona vision – for example, engineers launch hands-on activities with students to help them understand STEM concepts. In fact, mining engineers built a large electrical circuit station in the upper grade Makerspace, allowing students in grades 3-6 to explore open and closed circuits. Partners also assist in the campus improvement committee; serve as guest readers; and sponsor an annual Earth Day event. Ramona students are allowed to showcase their learning at the annual refinery community health fair, demonstrating their skills in using 3D pens to create structures, programming robots, and practicing their STEM project showcase presentations. The airborne chapter is instrumental in leading Ramona’s recognition of veterans in the community – they also participate in Career Day, and sponsor bicycles to recognize good behavior and attendance. During the 2020-2021 school year, the veteran recognition presentation was held virtually for students, parents and the community.

3. Creating Professional Culture:

Ramona stakeholders represent a core team that has worked together for several years and earned each other’s respect. They share a common goal of high expectations and high achievement for all students, as well as themselves. They build relationships with students, families, community members, and each other. Their dedication to their craft is evident in the teamwork they exhibit for the benefit of all students, and in the accolades that the school has achieved. The local university looks to the best practices at Ramona to help shape future educators. The campus is entrusted with interns annually across all grade levels, including PE. Most interns secure a position after graduation, due to the caliber of mentoring provided at Ramona, where teachers take pride in every child’s academic achievements. Within the collaborative leadership model, stakeholders are valued and included in campus decisions. Professional development is also personalized to the needs of staff in order to support students in the classroom.

When the campus was notified that teachers were going to teach remotely due to the pandemic, Ramona administrators, faculty, and staff came together as a family. Administration reassured faculty they would unify to support each other and its students and families. Weekly faculty virtual meetings were held to update staff members with new information from the district, with administration maintaining a positive tone and using digital presentations with music and photos of all the great things happening weekly. Teachers looked forward to these presentations, as they helped bring joy, unity and a sense that they were making a difference in the lives of students, families, and community members during challenging times. Teachers felt valued and supported, and were given the necessary time to work together to transition from traditional to online lessons. Professional development was planned according to teacher input and needs, and wherever possible, all staff came together to lend a helping hand. Training included virtual STEM challenges, PBL lessons, creating virtual classrooms, uploading lessons, and facilitating breakout rooms. Teachers learned virtual practices and shared learning with each other. Office staff supported teachers by calling parents of students who were absent and/or had technology issues. The school counselor not only reached out to students experiencing anxiety, depression, academic or social issues, but to staff and parents who felt overwhelmed or stressed. In addition, the routine of hearing the counselor’s morning SEL message of the day helped promote positivity and bring everyone together.

4. School Leadership:

Ramona's shared leadership philosophy allows for input from within clearly set parameters and expectations for the purpose of deciding what's best for students. It reflects a collaborative spirit that focuses on whatever it takes to ensure the academic, social, emotional success of all stakeholders. The importance of clear communication and building relationships and trust amongst staff and students are key components in building a strong team. The principal and leadership team promote a collaborative culture of support – for example, Professional Learning Communities consisting of administration, instructional coaches, grade-level and SPED teachers meet weekly to plan differentiated, high engagement lessons. Teachers invest time to get to know students through data and in person. Communication with parents, community members and Partners In Education ensures a common message of support and high expectations. Consistent systems of intentional supports exist to facilitate teacher planning, differentiation, and student interventions in order to maximize student growth. The hard-working and humble staff are committed to helping students and each other grow. Every staff member participated in creating the campus vision statement, which represents a collective desire for students to succeed beyond the Pre-kindergarten-20 academic setting. The STEM

program represents such teamwork. Grade-level teachers join together to create project-based lessons and STEM challenges, which are based on low performing standards and student needs. Campus members are strategically placed based on their strengths within the STEM challenge schedule to support student needs. STEM collaborative structures require students to work together with different sets of peers for each challenge. Additionally, the leadership team collaborates to create Makerspace stations for students. Campus successes are celebrated as a result of team effort amongst all stakeholders.

Safety is the number one priority at Ramona. Understanding the severity of the pandemic and parent/staff concerns regarding school reopenings, the principal faced new challenges in meeting the safety, well-being and academic needs of all. The principal formed a safety team consisting of administration, the nurse, office staff, custodians and support staff, and their campus preparedness and response plan addressed COVID-19 screening and rapid testing; social distancing; classroom set-up; safety drills; and maintaining a safe environment inside and outside the campus. Staff members are accountable for a safe and enriched learning environment, navigating any issues that arise as a united group. The idea that it takes a village to raise a child is taken to heart by all staff.

5. Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning:

An inclusive and respectful culture is evident at Ramona; visitors often comment about the welcoming environment. Ramona's success is rooted in the wonderful rapport that faculty and staff develop with students and families – the school's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion begins with relationships. To ensure students feel welcome every morning, they are greeted warmly by first name while entering the doors. With much compassion, everyone is accepted, and teachers embrace the needs of students by providing academic support and family assistance as well. These relationships also provide opportunities for students to connect to learning and experience multicultural celebrations, such as Hispanic Heritage and Black History months. Families engage in projects to highlight their customs, which teaches students how to respect each other and be good citizens and leaders of tomorrow. Every student's cultural background is valued and embraced; students share connections they make between their home life to the academics they are learning. Carefully selected books of the month represent multiple cultures and promote social acceptance. STEM challenges enable students to envision a real-world innovation that could make a positive impact to society. Authentic writing inspires students to contemplate prompts and respond at a personal level. Writing conferences with students seek to grasp and facilitate the student's message to their audience. As a result, students feel comfortable and safe to share their thoughts due to the school's supportive environment. It is common to see students supporting each other in all areas – sports, dancing, academics – regardless of ethnicity or disability; it is also customary to see students volunteer to partner with special-needs or ELL students to provide additional support. It is not uncommon for parents and staff to provide necessities for families in hardship.

Through daily social-emotional messages delivered during morning announcements, students are reminded that kindness, safety, respect, acceptance, and inclusiveness are a strong foundation for the relationships they form daily, whether at school or at home. Character-trait guidance lessons instill the importance of accepting and respecting others regardless of differences. Conflict-resolution lessons include role-playing by students, which results in fewer discipline referrals – in fact, administrators often receive phone calls from field-trip venues to compliment student behavior. Favorable employee engagement surveys frequently note that administration is caring and employees enjoy going to work. All stakeholders contribute to a family-style culture of care, respect, and high expectations, with the underlying belief that each student can succeed.

PART VI - STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

People refer to Ramona as a hidden gem, due in large part to the family-like atmosphere that comes from the consistent practice of building relationships among students, staff, and community.

At Ramona, students come first – and getting to know students and families is a priority. This connection helps meet student needs and convey high expectations, which ultimately leads to student success. Throughout the pandemic, teachers continued communications with parents and students via the phone, virtually, and at socially-distanced home visits, taking necessary measures to keep the focus on learning. Staff delivered devices, connected hot spots, provided small-group interventions, supported emotionally struggling students, and united with parents to enable prosperous instructional outcomes. Curriculum and STEM challenge materials were disseminated to all students monthly. Celebrations for good attendance, Student of the Month, and academic successes continued via announcements or a drive-through event – this included curbside ice-cream recognitions! Ramona held virtual 2020 promotion ceremonies for kindergartners and sixth-graders to honor the hard work and traditional transition of these students. Additionally, staff has been instrumental in securing agency referrals for family needs during the pandemic.

Staff also persevered throughout the pandemic to get to know their students, transfer their Professional Learning Community resources to a digital format, learn best practices to keep students engaged virtually, and acquire the skills of simultaneous teaching. These accomplishments were due to a cohesive team supporting students and each other. By keeping student success at the forefront, the support staff found ways to assist classroom teachers with training and implementing online learning through various digital tools to engage learners. Teachers quickly adapted to new means of instruction, often converting resources into a digital format to reach students. Through commitment and effort, the staff demonstrated its ability to positively influence students' education, regardless of the setting. Ramona staff remained united and supportive even as it sustained several COVID-related deaths among its families. Each time, their humble support of each other was evident in their outreach to each family.

Ramona's consistent practice of building relationships has played a key role in connecting students, staff, and the community during unprecedented times. As the saying goes: Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care – and with its caring, student-first culture, Ramona aims to make each day a positive one for students, knowing the kind of impact it will have for years to come.